The Honorable Rick Scott November 23, 2012

**RE: Colleges**

Dear Governor Scott:

I hope you had a joyous Thanksgiving celebration with your family and friends. We are all fortunate to live in this wonderful country. It is fitting that we set aside one day to pause from our daily routines to give thanks for the opportunities bestowed upon us as citizens and residents of this blessed nation.

Opportunity is the bedrock of our nation. No matter what setbacks our country may experience from time to time, the United States steadfastly remains the Land of Opportunity for the world to emulate. And, nothing better exemplifies that opportunity than education. My family is a good example.

My father did not graduate from high school due to financial reasons. My mother obtained a two-year degree from a community college. Our parents had the wisdom and conviction to make the education of their two children their paramount obligation. My brother was the first in the family to obtain a four-year degree. Between us, we have several graduate degrees. Our family knows, first hand, the benefits of a high quality college education and the need to make it affordable for the public.

I was contacted on Monday by one of your advisers to tell me that you would be announcing next week the portion of your Higher Education Agenda that relates to our colleges. I assume each member of the Board of Education was similarly contacted. I am writing to provide you with my input. I hope you will consider it.

Performance Based Funding

I was told that you would be announcing a plan to focus on Performance Based Funding. The details of your plan were not provided to me.

I support Performance Based Funding. You will find that the overwhelming number of our college presidents support measuring the production and productivity of their educational institutions. In fact, as I told you when we met in your office over a year ago, many of our colleges have been measuring their production and productivity for many years. I provided you with several documents that demonstrate that by several performance-based measures Florida’s colleges are highly productive, graduating more students with degrees than other colleges in the nation, and ranking at the top in the number of degrees awarded to Hispanics and African-Americans. This is particularly noteworthy in that the typical profile is a student in her twenties, working full time and attending college part-time.

The Florida College System has participated in Performance Based Funding in years past. Often times, however, the funding formulas have not been honored through appropriations. I encourage you to seek the participation of all college presidents in the development of the metrics, and to recognize the achievements of the students in the metrics. Performance Based Funding is a worthwhile concept, but the “devil is in the details.”

We can always do better. I welcome your interest in this area. But, I respectfully request that any Performance Based Funding plan recognize that any such plan is meaningless unless it is adequately funded. The funding appropriated for our colleges has significantly decreased since 2008. Our colleges have produced at a very high level for a very long time with an ever-diminishing amount of funding.

The “$10,000 Bachelor’s Degree”

Your adviser also told me that your plan calls for a challenge to the colleges to offer a “$10,000 Bachelor’s Degree.”

Respectfully, I think that you have been provided with very poor advice on this portion of you plan. The “$10,000 Bachelor’s Degree” is not a serious policy. It will be perceived as a gimmick pretending to be a policy used as a sound bite, and merely copying the plan announced last year by Governor Perry of Texas. I hope that you will reconsider announcing this portion of you plan and seek the input of the Board of Education on how best to develop an effective policy to achieve your objective.

All of us want for our colleges to provide a Bachelor’s Degree that is of high quality and affordable. We are very mindful of the amount of debts our students are carrying and we should strive to do all we can to minimize the financial burdens on our students. I am sensitive to this objective, as I am aware of the impact economic difficulties had on my parents’ ability to pursue their education. But, with the deep budget cuts over the last five years, it is difficult to conceive cutting the cost of instruction even further while maintaining a quality education. The cost of a Bachelor’s Degrees at many of our colleges cost the students on average approximately $12,000. Reducing this further, to create a cheap four-year degree, will undermine the quality and value of the education, hurting our students’ chances to compete successfully in our 21st Century economy. I am sure that is not the message that you would like to convey.

Of course, the cost to the student of a Bachelor’s Degree could be decreased further without sacrificing quality if the State of Florida were to appropriate more funding to the colleges. The burden then would not be placed on the student and the colleges would be able to maintain and even enhance the high quality of their instruction.

Governor Scott, as you know, Florida’s college system and many of its colleges are widely recognized, using many measures, as the best in the nation. Texas, the state that announced the “$10,000 Bachelor’s Degree,” does not have the quality of the colleges found in

Florida. Our colleges are recognized as the best, not just because of their access and affordability, but also because of their productivity, the quality of their instruction, and the value of their education.

That track record of excellence did not occur overnight. The first public community college in Florida was established in 1933. The current system dates back to the 1960s. The Board of Education has been overseeing the colleges since its establishment over ten years ago. I have been fortunate to obtain first hand knowledge as to how colleges operate and serve their communities, having had the privilege of serving for six years as the Chair of the Board of Trustees of Miami Dade College. Miami Dade College is the largest institution of higher education in the United States and one of the most highly regarded colleges in the nation. But, we have many other excellent colleges in Florida. All of our colleges were created with the idea that anyone with a desire to get a high quality college degree should be given that opportunity.

At a time when students are realizing that the only way to become part of the middle class is by getting a college education, the State of Florida has continued to disinvest in higher education during the last few years. Asking the colleges at this time to issue a “$10,000 Bachelor’s Degree” without commensurately increasing state funding is, I am certain, well-intentioned, but a very bad idea. I respectfully request that you reconsider announcing that portion of your plan and that you seek the input of the Board of Education and the presidents of all of our colleges to assist you to formulate a better way to make a high quality education affordable to all of our students.

Thank you for reading my comments. I hope that you will give serious consideration to my recommendations.

I wish you and your family a joyous and blessed holiday season. I remain,

Respectfully,

Roberto Martínez

cc: State Board of Education